Nova Scotia Department of Community Services

Statement of Mandate 2013-2014

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Message from the Minister and Deputy Minister

On behalf of the Department of Community Services, we are pleased to present the 2013-2014 Statement of Mandate.

Making life better continues to be our focus.

In April, the Province will be releasing its first Housing Strategy. The Strategy responds to what we've heard: more Nova Scotians living where they choose in homes they can afford. The Strategy will provide Nova Scotians with opportunities for homeownership, access to more affordable housing, and improved access to housing and support services for our seniors, those who face disadvantage and persons with disability. This year we will be investing an additional $5.6 million to increase income support for income assistance recipients and seniors. With this years' increase of $17/month, the personal allowance rates have improved by 23% since 2009. The Senior Property Tax Rebate program will also be enhanced, increasing the rebate from $600 to $800.

In 2013-2014, the department will continue to work towards the development of an outcome focused Employment Support & Income Assistance program, one that supports clients who have strong potential for employment success, to gain employment and to stay employed.

We will also be examining the benefit structures in our Employment Support & Income Assistance, Services for Persons with Disabilities programs to create a more transparent system which is easier to understand and administer. We are also continuing to engage with stakeholders in the development of a roadmap for Services for Persons with Disabilities program transformation.

Regards,

Denise Peterson-Rafuse
Minister, Department of Community Services

Rob Wood
Deputy Minister, Department of Community Service

1.0 Our Mandate

The primary responsibility of the Department of Community Services is to ensure the basic needs of individuals and families are met by providing financial support to persons in need and by protecting children and adults at risk. Most of the department's expenditures are in the form of direct payments to clients in need of financial assistance and child protection services or to service providers who provide prevention, residential, vocational, licensed and subsidized child care, and other social services, like programs for victims of domestic violence. These services form a secure and predictable social safety net for Nova Scotians and help contribute to better futures for children and families, persons with disabilities, seniors, and communities.

1.1 Our Mission

The Department of Community Services is committed to a sustainable social support system that promotes the independence, self-reliance, and security of the people we serve. This will be achieved through excellence in service delivery, leadership, and collaboration with our partners.

Services are delivered under the authority and direction of the following legislation:

Adoption Information Act
Children and Family Services Act
Day Care Act
Disabled Persons Commission Act
Employment Support and Income Assistance Act
Homes for Special Care Act
Protection of Persons in Care
Senior Citizen's Financial Aid Act
Social Assistance Act
Social Workers Act
Youth Secretariat Act

Each year, the service the Department provides reaches some 200,000 Nova Scotians, more than 20% of the provincial population. Services are broad in scope and include, but are not limited to:

- basic and special needs for over 44,000 people who benefit from the Income Assistance program,
- child benefits for some 38,000 children of low-income families,
- property tax rebates for almost 15,000 senior households,
- services for 18,000 tenants of public housing,
- 20,000 calls handled by Child Protection Services,
- support to over 800 foster families
- 25,800 Child Abuse Register searches,
- employment supports for some 8,000 income assistance recipients,
- placement and case management services for over 5,000 persons with disabilities,
- housing repair grants for over 2,000 families
- licensing services for 200 child care facilities, 340 homes and facilities providing residential care for persons with disabilities; and some 20 facilities providing residential and other support to children in care
- additional financial support through the poverty reduction credit program to almost 15,000 income assistance recipients
- grant management, and funding support to over 600 service providers and community based organizations

2.0 Our Priorities

Below is a description of the department's 2013-2014 priorities to help make life more affordable, break the cycle of poverty, and contribute to the overall health and well-being of Nova Scotians, while ensuring government lives within its means.

More information on the department's programs and services can be found on the department's website, http://www.gov.ns.ca/coms/.

2.1 Make Life More Affordable and Breaking the Cycle of Poverty

Employment Support and Income Assistance (ESIA) Benefit Restructuring

Nova Scotia's income assistance benefit structure has not been examined in over a decade. Overtime this has become increasingly complicated to administer and for clients to understand.

Over the course of the next several years the Department will develop benefit structure options which align benefits with defined outcomes for clients.

A new benefit structure would be more transparent and easier to understand while reducing time-consuming administrative tasks for caseworkers, freeing up time to support clients.

In 2013-2014, Community Services will initiate a project to:

- Complete a comprehensive review of the current benefit structure, and structures in other jurisdictions, and emerging best practice;
- Engage with clients/stakeholders to better understand their needs and potential areas for improvement; and
- Develop models to test alternative benefit structures.

ESIA Transformation

The department continues to implement the ESIA transformation project, focusing on policy and program changes to support client outcomes - to maximize client independence and self-reliance, enhance client access, and improve service satisfaction by addressing administrative burden for both staff and clients.

Employment provides the best opportunity for individuals to attain self-sufficiency and exit from poverty. A job provides more than income – it provides hope and dignity. As such, the department wants to make sure people, including those with disabilities, have a chance to take advantage of job opportunities. To help facilitate an ESIA client's movement towards employment, the department provides funding for employment related training, and special needs such as child care, transportation, or work related clothing.

In 2013-2014, the department will continue to work towards the development of an outcome focused program that supports clients to gain employment as soon as possible and stay employed. The initial focus is on recipients who have strong potential for employment success, with a goal of helping them to connect to the labour market and break their cycle of poverty.

Enhance Income Supports

The Department of Community Services, through our ESIA program, provides financial assistance to approximately 28,800 households in need. In 2013-2014, the personal allowance will increase by $17/month, an additional investment of $5 million. Investing in income supports is one of the necessary building blocks to breaking the cycle of poverty.

Senior Property Tax Rebate

In 2013-2014, the Department will enhance the Senior Property Tax Rebate. The rebate for seniors living in their own homes and in receipt of the Federal Guaranteed Income Supplement will be increased from $600 to $800.

2.2 Better Healthcare for You and Your Family

Services for Persons for Disabilities Transformation

Over the past year, the departments of Health and Wellness and Community Services have been working on an initiative, Continuing Care/Services for Persons with Disabilities (CC/SPD), to create a harmonized, accessible and person-focused system, with more focus on home/family-based programs and greater supports in the community.

Opportunities and options are important for those with disabilities and their families. We are working with our partners and members of the disability community to build on our existing services, and to identify creative solutions to enable more people to transition to community living.

In 2013-2014, following the completion of a series of community engagement activities, an action plan will be developed to better support seniors and persons with disabilities to live independently in inclusive and welcoming communities, regardless of their health status or level of ability.

Aligned with the broader CC/SPD initiative, Community Services with the assistance of the Institute for Research and Development on Inclusion in Society (IRIS) will be initiating a key stakeholder engagement process. The SPD engagement process will be guided by the vision and principles emerging from the CC/SPD initiative. It is through this engagement process that a roadmap for SPD program transformation will be drafted in partnership with community and government stakeholders.

Adoption Strategy

Children and youth require safe and nurturing environments to enable them to develop to their full potential. Every child deserves a forever family, a home that provides a permanent, loving and secure environment. Unfortunately some children, through no fault of their own, are in permanent care of the Minister of Community Services. Right now there are over 800 children who do not have a permanent home.

Last year, the Department developed a strategy to substantially increase the number of adoptions. This is still a priority for the Department. In 2013-2014, the department will continue to implement a series of improvements including specialized training for staff, making the very best use of staff resources, implementing new tools to increase the system's capacity, tracking both children in care and waiting families, and streamlining and simplifying processes.

Improving Outcomes for Children in Care

At times, some youth in permanent care of the Minister, require additional encouragement and support to complete their high school education and pursue further career development opportunities.

In 2013-2014, the department will initiate a project to improve the educational and career development outcomes for children in our care. This will involve:

- The implementation of a pilot project in central region that provides career assessment and counseling services to approximately 20 youth in care;
- Enhancing the knowledge and skills of social workers, foster parents and residential staff to provide guidance on education and career support planning to children in care; and
- Developing a process and system to better track and monitor the specific educational needs of children in care.

2.3 Get back to balance and ensure government lives within its means

Service Delivery

Government is promoting all departments to find new and innovative ways to deliver services to the citizens of Nova Scotia.

Maintaining the sustainability of the social support system while responding to societal and demographic change, is putting increasing pressure on our current service delivery structure.

Our vision is to make it easier for clients to connect to the department's social support system, by providing a "client-centered, no wrong door, multi-channeled" service delivery system that integrates telephone, internet, and in-person service delivery. Services will be organized around the client's needs, rather than the various programs available.

As a first step, in 2013-2014, the department will be making improvements to telephone service aimed at providing citizen friendly service, improved access to programs and services, an increased rate of "first call" resolution, and fewer incidents of busy signals and voice mail messages; and exploring ways to provide on-line services.

3.0 Budget Context

Community Services			
	2012-2013 Estimate	**2012-2013 Forecast**	**2013-2014 Estimate**
Program & Service Area	($thousands)	($thousands)	($thousands)
Gross Departmental Expenses:			
Senior Management	1,589	1,679	1,943
Corporate Services Unit	9,048	8,175	8,479
Policy and Information Management	8,846	8,339	8,437
Field Offices	14,110	13,328	13,831
Services For Persons with Disabilities	260,557	276,199	267,592
Family and Children's Services	188,803	185,491	183,771
Housing Services	104,729	34,855	34,818
Employment Support and Income Assistance	381,234	400,122	368,961
Housing Authority and Property Operations	9,008	9,427	8,741
Total Departmental Expenses	977,924	937,615	896,573
TCA Purchase Requirements	100	215	0
Provincial Funded Staff (FTEs)	1,662	1,668	1,755

4.0 Performance Measures

Outcome: Increased number of Nova Scotians living independent of income assistance

Measure/ Rationale	Base Year Data	Targets	Trends	Strategic Priorities and Actions
Number and % of NS living in poverty (LICO) – identifies NS who are at or below the poverty line	2006: 76,000; 8.4% of the NS population	reduce the number and % of NS living in poverty	2010: 71,000 7.7% 2008: 75,000; 8.3% 2007: 74,000; 8.2%	Implement an employment first approach Enhance income supports Alter policy and service delivery approaches to maximize client independence and self-reliance Provide funding for employment related training, and special needs such as child care, transportation, or work related clothing Identify and implement employment support programs and services aimed at youth
Number and % of children living in poverty (LICO) - identifies children who are at or below the low income cut-off	2006: 16,000; 8.7% of the NS children	reduce the number and % of children living in poverty	2010: 15,000 8.9% 2009: 14,000 8.2% 2008: 14,000; 7.9% 2007: 15,000; 8.4%	
Average monthly beneficiaries as a % of the NS population - represents the % of low income households dependent, in whole or in part, on Income Assistance to meet their basic needs in the context of the NS population	2005-06: 5.5% of the NS population	reduce the caseload by 1600	2011-12: 4.7% 2010-11: 4.7% 2009-10: 4.6% 2008-09: 4.6% 2007-08: 4.8% 2006-07: 5.1%	
% of Income Assistance (IA) recipients with wage income - is an indication of recipients with labour market attachment and their ability to achieve a greater degree of self-reliance and independence	2010-11: 9.2%	2013-14: 10% of recipients with wage income	2011-12: 9.1%	
% of youth (16 - 24) receiving Income Assistance assisted to enhance their employability - youth in financial need have opportunities to transition to employment and self-reliance	2005-06: 30.7% of youth assisted	2013-14: 47% of youth assisted to enhance their employability	2011-12: 45% 2010-11: 42% 2009-10: 40% 2008-09: 37% 2007-08: 37.5% 2006-07: 34.4%	

Outcome: Improved educational, justice, health, social and economic determinants of children in care and children of income assistance recipients

Measure/ Rationale	Base Year Data	Targets	Trends	Strategic Priorities and Actions
% of children in permanent care placed for adoption - it is in a child's best interest to be placed for adoption as quickly as possible as secure stable family environment is an important factor in healthy child development	2008-09: 8.7% of children in permanent care adopted	2013-14: 13.6% children in permanent care adopted	2011-12:12.5% 2010-11:11.9% 2009-10: 10.8%	Implement a series of improvements including specialized training for staff, clarifying some roles and responsibilities to make the very best use of staff resources, implementing new tools to increase the system's capacity, tracking both children in care and waiting families, and streamlining and simplifying processes
Number of spaces in regulated child care settings - is a measure of the department's commitment to provide safe child care	2006-07: 13,249 spaces	2013-14: 17,000 spaces	2011-12: 16,377 2010-11: 15,404 2009-10: 14,485 2008-09: 14,135 2007-08: 13,455	Through the Early Years initiative, the Province is developing a policy direction and action plan to integrate approaches to early childhood development programs
% of child care spaces subsidized - an indicator of the availability of child care for low income families	2006-07: 23% (3,045 subsidies) of licensed child care spaces were subsidized	2013-14: 31% of child care spaces subsidized	2011-12: 27% (4,427) 2010-11: 27% (4,177) 2009-10: 27% (3,925) 2008-09: 24% (3,425) 2007-08: 23% (3,154)	

Outcome: Maximize client independence, self-reliance and improve social inclusion

Measure/ Rationale	Base Year Data	Targets	Trends	Strategic Priorities and Actions
% of SPD clients supported in community based options – enables persons with disabilities to participate and remain in their homes and communities benefitting from all aspects of family and community living	TBD	2013-14: 55% of SPD clients supported in community based options	2011-12: 1,044 2010-11: 952 2009-10: 952 2008-09: 1,044 2007-08: 1,082 2006-07: 1,133	Create a harmonized, accessible and person-focused system, with more focus on home/family-based programs and greater supports in the community Create a roadmap for SPD program transformation
% of SPD licensed facilities with outstanding violations that have not been corrected within a specified time - measure of the quality of SPD licensed facilities	2010-11: 30%	2013-14: 10% or lower	2012-13: 10.7% 2011-12: 7%	Provide support to facility operators early in the process before issues escalate
Licensing turn-around time for processing initial licenses, renewals, and change requests- proportion of applications processed within the 10 day service standard	2010-11: 99.1%	95% or higher	2011-12: 93.4%	Review the change request process to achieve more efficiencies